
THE
COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

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There is in souls a sympathy with sounds ;
And as the mind is pitch'd, the ear is pleas'd
With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave.
Some chord in unison with what we hear
Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies.
How soft the music of those village bells,
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet ! now dying all away,
Now pealing loud again and louder still,
Clear and sonorous, as the gale comes on. COWPER.

TO THE COUNTRY SPECTATOR.

Dear Sir,

IN your frequent visits to the adjacent villages, it is rather surprizing that so conspicuous an object as the *Church* should not already have attracted your notice. Something, indeed, may be said in excuse for your calling first at the village-Inn and the News-Room, because from your walk it may be supposed you stand in need of some re-

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freshment, and Politics are, at this time, peculiarly interesting. But I hope your attention to your "favorite author" will not always prevent your seeing a steeple any more than a sign-post; especially as the striking of the village-clock or the ringing of the bells may chance sometimes forcibly to break in upon your reverie and turn your thoughts to the former object; the very circumstance, I should add, which has just happened to myself during a solitary ramble in the Country (for I also am a *Pedestrian*) and which has given immediate occasion to this letter.

Several of our poetic writers have noticed the fine effect, which, they tell you, is often produced in the breast of the contemplative traveller by the distant sound of village bells. And tho' that effect must undoubtedly vary with the occasion, be it merry or mournful, which calls forth "the melting air or martial, brisk or grave", yet these writers would persuade us, that there is in their minds so powerful a sympathy with these different sounds, that some chord within them never fails to be "in unison with what they hear", and as our bard expresses it, "the heart replies". I suppose the lively imagination of your *Poets* is seldom at a loss in supplying some correspondent scene, even tho' they are unacquainted with the real event announced to the listening villagers. For instance; in the solemn lengthened knell *they* have the sagacity to discover,

and are immediately led to contemplate, the funeral procession of some rustic nymph or swain.

With dirges due in sad array
Slow thro' the Church-way path they see him borne. GRAY.

On the contrary, "while the merry bells ring round" they participate, with equal ingenuity and sympathy of thought, in the supposed importance of a victory obtained in the doughty contest of cricket or foot-ball, or in the mirth and jollity of a Country wake or wedding. Now, it is not to be supposed, that *common folk* should have the same quickness of apprehension, as these *learned* and *sentimental* gentlemen: yet, as by repetition a hard lesson will become familiar to the dullest scholar, I am sometimes apt to be astonished, when I find so many stupid heads in every village and country-town, who cannot for their lives be brought to understand or to remember the reason, why their Parish-bells are rung once (I mean on the first day) in every week. On the other occasions, which I have mentioned, their eagerness of *inquiry* supplies the place of the Poets *imagination*, and there appears to be in their minds almost an equal "sympathy with sounds". But whether it be owing to the too frequent recurrence of these sounds on their weekly festival, by which they become familiar, or whether to some other inexplicable cause, certain it is, that on *Sunday*, they who live at any distance to

windward, can seldom hear them, and some, who live nearer on the opposite side, are not much pleased with the noise. Few seem at all to enter into the joyous feelings intended to be excited in their minds by the event announced to them on this day.

For myself, Sir, I must own that, on many occasions, I am very fond of this species of music : through the medium of it I have often been sympathetically moved "to rejoice with those that did rejoice, and to weep with those that wept." In every *common* cause either of mirth or mourning we feel ourselves indebted to the invention ; but, surely, there is no cause, in which we are so universally interested as that, which least of all arrests the general attention and regard. On *my* ears these sounds never fall so sweetly, as when they awaken in me the remembrance that I live in a Christian Country, and invite me tho' buried in an obscure village far removed from the center of wealth and the seats of learning,—not to a school of obtruse Philosophy, to which the vulgar have no access, and from which, if they had, they could receive no benefit,—but to a Christian Church, to hear the sublimest doctrines of Religion and morality rendered intelligible to all ; to a service, on which all, even the poorest peasants, are equally enjoined to attend, and to profit by which no other qualification is requisite than a desire of information.

Be not, however, alarmed, good Mr. *Spectator* : I am not going to *preach*, or to compel you to do it ; though I have thus brought you, by force, to Church, and at the very time, when, from the prefixed motto, you might fear some such intention. All I wish is to put you in mind, that your illustrious predecessor was a professed and regular Churchgoer, and that therefore I hope (even tho' you were a convert to Mr. *Wakefield's* new and hitherto unheard of doctrine of the absurdity and inexpediency of Public Worship) you will follow his example and sometimes attend Church, if not from other motives, at least in your *Spectatorial capacity*. The very suspicion of your being there would, I am persuaded, have the happiest influence on some of *our* congregation and that of other parishes within the circuit of your visitations ; who, tho' unrestrained by reverence to the place, in which they are assembled, or respect to the Minister, who officiates, would be terribly afraid of indulging in any improper levities, which the Country Spectator might notice, and condemn in his next Number. I hope too you will pay strict attention to the chiming of the bells, and take care always to be there in time ; that you may observe those, who make a practice of *coming in late*, to the great disturbance of the congregation, as well as those, who do not come at all.

With respect to these last mentioned persons indeed, Old *Spec* had one great advantage over you.

For the benefit of such, as could not conveniently attend him to Church, or did not care to do it, he kindly furnished every *Saturday* a serious discourse for their perusal at home; which had every excellence of a sermon, except that it had a *Greek* or *Latin* text from some profane Author; this, I imagine, was intended as a bait to a particular class of Readers, who would esteem a preference of *Homer* or *Horace* to St. *Matthew* or St. *Paul*, an additional recommendation. However, as your plan will not permit you to follow his example in this particular, and we Country folk must consequently be deprived of a regular, sober, *Saturday's* Essay, I presume you will agree with me, that there is the greater reason why we should constantly avail ourselves of the *Sunday's* lecture, which is still fortunately preserved to us. Nor will you, I hope, think your Paper for once misapplied, in ringing a peal in the ears of those, who seldom attending Church are out of the reach of the Preacher's admonitions, and who, tho' they are deaf to the call of their Parish-bells, may perhaps be induced to listen to the smoothly-flowing harmony of *Cowper's* verse.

I remain, Sir,

Your humble Serv^t.

20 Nov. 1792.

Leonard Lovechurch.

P. S. Tho', Sir, I have in my letter very freely animadverted on the stupidity of those, who seem to have no ear for "the music of the village-bells",

yet even of those, who duly listen to them and obey their summons, I have observed some, whom I think scarcely less reprehensible for their conduct in the place of worship, which I myself attend. I will not dwell upon a multitude of improprieties, which have been repeatedly censured already, and that too with so little success, as to afford no encouragement to future satirists. Of this kind are ogling, tittering and whispering during the service; making tea-parties as soon as the service is concluded; and sleeping a sort of *dog-sleep* during the Sermon, which, as the sleeper is never left in the Church after the other part of the congregation, plainly proves, that he is *not* so much in want of *rest* as of *attention*. All these however are indecencies, with the bare mention of which I shall be satisfied: but there is one species of folly, which, I believe, is more novel than any of the former, and therefore, you may expose it, not without hopes of effecting a reformation. Till of late, the Squire of the village, in which I reside, always opened the door of his pew without the least assistance from any of his domestics; but ever since his last visit to *London* he has made it a practice to *parade* up the aisle preceded by a fine gilt footman, who holds open the pew-door, while his master walks in, and having made a bow and shut it to again, retires to another part of the Church to open a door for himself. I do not at all dislike to see the Mayor of a *Country Town* preceded by his lictors, or dignified by any of the *insignia* of his

Worship's Office: such distinctions seem useful in impressing the minds of the populace with just ideas of the importance of their magistrates; yet I cannot think that our Squire or any other Gentleman would lose a tittle of his consequence by opening the door of his pew, any more than he does by opening that of his dining-room or bed-chamber:—and even though he should be thought to give up some part of his dignity in a place, in which men are naturally more equal than they are in their secular situations, the worst that could be said of him would be, that he feels some degree of—*humility in Church*. But I will not terrify you a second time with the prospect of a Sermon, and therefore shall conclude my Postscript with requesting you to admonish your male Readers, (for I except the *Ladies*, whom Nature has not formed to endure *fatigue*) and more especially those, who by any artifice evade the duty on Servants, not to think of employing their footmen to open their pew-doors, as it is the most effectual method of informing the whole Parish, that they do not wait on themselves.

I am, Sir, Your's, as before.

A.